

The Builder.

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HAVING a personal interest in the restoration of the beautiful church of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, in addition to the strong feelings of admiration with which we regard the structure, and to our public duty—constantly to advocate the maintenance and restoration of the noble architectural works left us by our forefathers,—we cannot omit availing ourselves of the opportunity to bring the matter again before the public, which is afforded us by the first anniversary meeting of the "Canyng Society," held last week. This society, as our readers may remember, was established at the beginning of the present year, to aid by annual subscriptions, to be announced at a public dinner, in obtaining funds for the undertaking; and it has prospered so well—thanks to the exertions of the gentlemen who are working it—that we have no doubt the example will be followed elsewhere. The advantage to be derived from such an organisation is very great; the matter is kept before the public, a feeling in favour of the object is widely spread in fresh circles, and co-operation is thereby assured.

The proceedings commenced, according to a rule of the society, with service in the venerable edifice; and the Rev. E. Tottenham, in the course of a sermon which he preached on a text from Isaiah,—“The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious,”—made some observations, which may serve for arguments in other places as well as Bristol.

The glory of Lebanon, remarked the preacher, did not consist merely in its height and extent, but in the cedars, vines, and ‘those goodly stones hewn out of the quarries thereof;’ for at the time of the erection of the temple, ‘costly stones, hewn stones, and cedars’ were brought from Lebanon for the erection of the house of God. From this example, therefore, they were warranted in coming to the conclusion, that they were bound to decently maintain and comely beautify the house of God. They did not want those gorgeous, and vain, and meretricious adornments of other times, and churches, and religions; it was not a Jewish temple they wanted, it was not a place for Judaised and Paganised Christianity; what they wanted was simply an erection which should be decent and honourable towards God, and suitable and convenient to those who used it. They read in the history of the Israelites, the temple having been allowed to fall into decay and a state of dilapidation, that when good men came into power the commandment went forth to repair and beautify the house of God. Gorgeous were the palaces—for they were truly palaces—which men erected for themselves, and decorated in the most costly manner, and if they acted thus with themselves, how much the more did it become them to pay respect to the house of God? There were instances mentioned in Scripture bearing upon this point. David was represented as saying when he conceived the idea of erecting a temple, ‘I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.’ True, the real glory of God’s house did not consist in its architectural splendour, but they might lawfully cultivate the same, and render the sacred edifice as beautiful as possible. It was not necessary for him to give any detailed history of the edifice,

nor to descant upon its architectural beauties: those matters had been already explained to them, but there were one or two objections to the restoration to which he would endeavour to reply. Some objected to it upon account of the great expense, and others upon the ground that they would rather see it remain in its present decayed state, as being more interesting. He would, however, say to such, that the restoration of the church was absolutely necessary to its preservation. The restoration, too, ought to be carried out consistently with the character of the edifice and its architectural beauties, and in accordance with the original design, the development of which was that day pressed upon them. There was another objection which some might raise, and that was the objection to so much money being spent in the restoration of a church, while so many new churches were required throughout the length and breadth of the land. If this were a new question he might admit the validity of the objection, and agree that 40,000*l.* would perhaps be better expended in the erection of four or eight new churches. But this was not a new question, and did not come to them in the same light as the erection of a new church at a similar outlay. The question was this, whether they would suffer that venerable pile to fall into a state of absolute decay; and he then earnestly entreated them not to suffer this to be the case.

At the dinner, which was numerous attended, the company including the Venerable Archdeacon Thorp, the Rev. R. Whish, and many of the clergy, Mr. J. Kerle Habersfield ably presided, and many pertinent speeches were made, of which, however, we must only give those portions which are likely to interest our architectural and antiquarian readers, and others engaged in similar restorations.

The Mayor of Bristol said,—That within the next four and twenty hours, he now spoke more particularly to the gentlemen of Redcliffe, one of the most important committees that could affect their parish would have determined upon what would be the greatest improvement that could happen in their day, being nothing less than laying the foundation-stone, if he might so call it, of widening their street from end to end. The improvement of their city was an excellent work, and what they were engaged in at that moment was the very essence of such work. He hoped that that day would be the beginning of an effort so successful, that they would see the work for which it was established, namely, the restoration of Redcliffe Church, accomplished even in their own time. On the hill of Redcliffe there stood a church, which, if he was rightly informed, had been built 1,000 years ago. Time, the destroyer of all things, destroyed that, and there was no church there till they came to that excellent and worthy merchant, William Canynge, who built the present edifice for them. That church was built in seven years, surely the restoration of it might be accomplished in that or rather half the time. Surely the spirit of Canynge was not departed out of Bristol though his wealth had. Some persons took alarm at the restoration of churches; it had absolutely been written upon as the restoration of Popery, but he really thought it could not justly be so interpreted, and he was quite sure that it was not so regarded by the people of Redcliffe. Suppose it was found convenient to have lights placed in churches, and to have a certain form of table or seat, these were trivial matters, and Popery was not to be found in such trifles. He hoped better things, and he was desirous that while restoring the church they would go back to what Redcliffe originally was. It was recorded that the parish church of Westbury was built at the same time, and he was old enough himself to recollect the ancient seats or forms of carved massive oak which had no doors, but were open to the parishioners for each to sit where he pleased. It had subsequently been pewed over, and in 1709 Redcliffe had been served the same. Now, they must be aware, that the service of the church was a social and not an exclusive worship, and he stood there as a public man to protest against the high-pewed door and the lock and key. It was not for him to pronounce whether or

not the committee for restoring Redcliffe Church had in view the altering of those pews or not, but he trusted that the thing would never be considered complete or finished till something was done for the internal arrangements of that noble fabric.

The President made some very pertinent remarks on the erection of the church by Canynge, and pointing to its present state, urged all who felt a pride and a glory in the monument to press forward to rescue it from destruction. He then read a report from the committee, which stated that nearly 200 members were enrolled, whose annual subscriptions amounted to 300*l.* In addition to that sum 150*l.* had been contributed by various friends, which, with 40*l.* collected that day at the church, made the first result of their operations nearly 500*l.* The required sum of 40,000*l.* could not be hoped for at once, but they might perhaps raise 1,000*l.* or 1,500*l.* a-year, and with this much could be done.

Mr. J. G. Shaw congratulated his fellow-citizens on what was going on in Bristol; they saw, on the one hand, a comparatively modern but most beautiful building, which was devoted to commerce, the Exchange, in the act of restoration, and, on the other hand, the foundation of this excellent society for restoring, in its full beauty and integrity, a building devoted to the worship of the ever-living God; and though for accomplishing this, they must put a tax upon their pockets, he was sure every citizen would agree with him that, in doing their duty, they were doing themselves an honour, and leaving behind them a memorial of the existence of themselves and the utility of their generation. The work that had already been completed proved how ably and efficiently the committee had performed its duties, and he was convinced that the gentlemen who composed it would not be angry at his selecting one gentleman who had honoured himself, he believed not only for time but for all time—he meant Mr. Proctor. He believed that gentleman had earned for himself not only a great reputation among his fellow-citizens, but that all over the kingdom, where a fine piece of antiquity, and a noble structure of architecture was admired, gratitude would be felt towards Mr. Proctor, who had been the life and soul of the present movement. Mr. Shaw then urged upon the committee that, as they could only go on bit by bit, they might do some important part that would be a key to the whole, giving a guarantee that it should be finished within a given time; if this were done, he knew gentlemen who had already contributed handsomely, that would do so again.

Mr. Proctor (the originator of the Society) said, in the course of a good speech, that the restoration of Redcliffe Church was fraught with many pleasing associations, not the least of which were the kind sympathy and co-operation which those who were engaged in it had received from their fellow-citizens. That the work would be accomplished, he was as certain as that he had that day the pleasure of meeting them; it would merely be a matter of time. The church was to be esteemed, because it was one of the finest architectural specimens which they had in this country, and would improve their taste and lead them to increase and extend the beauties of those churches which they hereafter erected. It was also to be maintained because it had been built by a Bristol merchant, and the Bristol merchants could not allow that to pass away which was a memorial of such philanthropy and munificence on the part of one of their body. Bristol could not allow it to go into decay so long as she possessed merchants. It would not be the Committee’s fault if the church was not completely and speedily restored. With respect to the internal arrangements, that had been matter of serious consideration on their part, and the present pews were certainly not more objectionable in the eyes of the Mayor than in those of the Committee: they would get them away if they could, but until they had preserved the exterior they could not think of touching the interior. They had hitherto expended the money not so much in what gratified the eye as in what